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Big Love

by CHARLES L. MEE

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Lydia
Olympia
Thyona
Bella/Eleanor
Piero/Leo

Giuliano
Constantine
Oed
Nikos

Blackout.

Full volume: wedding processional music:
the triumphant music at the end of Scene 13, Act III,
of Mozart's Marriage of Figaro.

Lydia walks up the aisle,
looking somewhat disoriented,
carrying a wedding bouquet,
in a white wedding dress that is disheveled,
a little torn in places, dirty in spots.

She steps up onto the stage,
goes to the bathtub,
drops the bouquet on the floor,

takes off all her clothes,
or simply walks out of them,
steps into the tub,
leans her head back against the rim, exhausted,
and closes her eyes,
her arms thrown back out of the tub as though she were crucified,
as we listen to the music finish playing.

Now, quietly, sweetly, restfully,
Pachelbel's Canon in D
is heard,
and Giuliano steps onto the stage,
a glass of wine in his hand.

He is a young Italian man, handsome, agreeable,
weak and useless.
He seems a little surprised to see Lydia there
apparently napping in the tub.

This is Italy:
rose and white.

If Emanuel Ungaro had a villa on the west coast of Italy, this would be it:
we are outdoors,
on the terrace or in the garden,
facing the ocean:

wrought iron
white muslin
flowers
a tree
an arbor
an outdoor dinner table with chairs for six
a white marble balustrade
elegant
simple
basic
eternal.

But the setting for the piece should not be real, or naturalistic.
It should not be a set for the piece to play within
but rather something against which the piece can resonate:
something on the order of a bathtub, 100 olive trees,
and 300 wine glasses half-full of red wine.

More an installation than a set.

It is midsummer evening—the long, long golden twilight.

Giuliano and Lydia speak, quietly, and with many silences between their words, as
the music continues under the dialogue.

[Note: there are lots of Italians in this play,
but I don't think the actors should speak in Italian accents—
with the sole exception of Bella—
any more than they would if they were doing Romeo and Juliet
or the Merchant of Venice.
Except for Bella, these are English-speaking international travelers.]

GIULIANO
Hello.

[she opens her eyes]

LYDIA
Hello.

GIULIANO
I'm Giuliano.

LYDIA
Hello, Giuliano.

GIULIANO
And you are....

LYDIA
Lydia.

GIULIANO

Lydia.

I don't think we've met.

LYDIA

No.

GIULIANO

You've just—arrived.

LYDIA

Yes.

GIULIANO

That's your boat offshore?

LYDIA

Yes.

GIULIANO

A big boat.

LYDIA

Well...it belongs to my family.

GIULIANO

You've come for the weekend?

LYDIA

Yes, oh, yes, at least.

GIULIANO

You're friends of my sister.

LYDIA

Your sister?

GIULIANO
My uncle?

LYDIA
Your uncle?

[silence]

GIULIANO
I don't mean to be rude, but...

[with a smile]

who was it invited you?

LYDIA
Invited us?

GIULIANO
You didn't come to the party?
You mean: you're not a guest.

LYDIA
Oh, you mean, this is your home.
I'm in your home.

GIULIANO
Yes.
Well, it's my uncle's house.

LYDIA
It's so big.
I thought it was a hotel.

GIULIANO
We have a big family.

LYDIA
I'm sorry I just...

GIULIANO

It's OK.

Where do you come from?

LYDIA

Greece.

GIULIANO

Greece. You mean
just now?

LYDIA

Yes.

My sisters and I.

We were to be married to our cousins, and
well, we didn't want to, but
we had to, so
when the wedding day came
we just got on our boat and left
so
here we are.

GIULIANO

Just like that.

LYDIA

Yes.

GIULIANO

Just walked away from the altar
and sailed away from Greece.

LYDIA

Yes.

Where are we?

GIULIANO

Italy.

This is Italy.

LYDIA

Oh. Italy.

I love Italy.

GIULIANO

It's...well...yes. So do I.

And your sisters are still on the boat?

LYDIA

Yes, most of them.

We came....

[looking around]

at least, some of us came ashore.

There are fifty of us all together.

GIULIANO

Fifteen?

LYDIA

Fifty.

Fifty sisters.

GIULIANO [laughing awkwardly]

I...

I don't think even I know anyone who has fifty sisters.

And you were all to get married to your cousins?

LYDIA

Yes.

GIULIANO

To your cousins?

LYDIA

Yes.

We're looking for asylum.

We want to be taken in here
so we don't have to marry our cousins.

GIULIANO

You want to be taken in as immigrants?

LYDIA

As refugees.

GIULIANO

Refugees.

LYDIA

Yes.

GIULIANO

From...

LYDIA

From Greece.

GIULIANO

I mean, from, you know:
political oppression, or war....

LYDIA

Or kidnapping. Or rape.

GIULIANO

From rape.

LYDIA

By our cousins.

GIULIANO

Well, marriage really.

LYDIA

Not if we can help it.

[silence]

GIULIANO

I see.

LYDIA

You seem like a good person, Giuliano.

We need your help.

[silence]

GIULIANO

I think you should talk to my uncle.

Piero, he has...connections.

Just stay right here.

If you'll wait here,

I'll bring him out.

LYDIA

Thank you.

[the conversation ends just a few moments
before the end of the 4:58 of the Pachelbel Canon in D;
Giuliano leaves, and
she weeps and weeps while the music finishes.

Suddenly, Clarke's Trumpet Voluntary announces the entrance
of two more young women in wedding dresses:
OLYMPIA and THYONA.

Their wedding dresses, too, are of course white,
but in different styles,
and in varying states of disrepair—

torn or dirty or wrinkled.

Olympia carries the broken heel of a high-heeled shoe,
and she walks, up and down, in a single shoe.

The women enter without ceremony,
dragging in a huge steamer trunk,
struggling with it.

Or else they have a matching set of luggage,
eight pieces or more, that they wrestle onto the stage,
and they peel off, one by one, exhausted or exasperated with the luggage,
giving up on it.

Olympia goes to the bathtub,
pulls up her dress and sits on the edge
with her feet in the tub
as Clarke's Trumpet Voluntary segues into the intro for "You Don't Own Me,&"
and, Olympia sings with all her heart.

Thyona meanwhile, unpacks wedding gifts from the trunk—
plates and glasses and cups and saucers,
and—to set the scene for what kind of a play this is,
that it is not a text with brief dances and other physical activities
added to it, but rather a piece in which
the physical activities and the text are equally important to the experience—
she hurls the plates and cups and glasses with all her force against the wall
shattering them into a million bits.

Lydia joins in singing with Olympia on the choruses;
finally Thyona joins in the singing, too.

BELLA, an old Italian woman in black dress and babushka
with a basket of tomatoes, comes out before the song ends;
she drags out a simple wooden chair and a folding card table with her,
which she sets up noisily]

BELLA
Scusi, eh?

[and she sits and starts sorting through her tomatoes,
putting the nice ones to one side,
shining them a bit first on her apron.

Bella looks up at the young women]

BELLA

So.

This is your wedding day?

LYDIA

No.

BELLA

You are trying on your dresses
because your wedding day is coming soon.

LYDIA

No.

THYONA

No, we're not getting married.

BELLA

You have been married already.

OLYMPIA

No.

BELLA

So, it's none of my business.

And yet, I can tell you
marriage is a wonderful thing.

Imagine that:

No husbands.

At your age.

And children.
When I was your age already I had three sons.
Now, I have thirteen sons.

LYDIA
Thirteen sons.

BELLA
My oldest, that's Piero,
he stays home here with his mother.
He's a good boy.

[she puts one polished tomato carefully, lovingly to one side, as though it were her own baby]

But too old for you.

LYDIA
We were hoping to meet Piero. We wanted to....

BELLA [ignoring Lydia, continuing]
My second son, Paolo,
he lives just next door
a doctor
he takes good care of people here in town

[another polished tomato placed lovingly to one side]

Married.
Five children.
A good boy.
Paolo, he is Giuliano's father.
You met Giuliano?

LYDIA
Yes, and he said we might be able to meet....

BELLA [ignoring Lydia, continuing]
My third son, he's in business here in the town,
visits me every week
every Sunday without fail
a good boy.
Also married,
four children.

[another polished tomato tenderly to one side]

LYDIA
Excuse me, but....

BELLA
My fourth son
he was a sweet child
cherubic
such little cheeks
such a tender boy
a sunny disposition

[she puts another tomato to one side,
but too close to the edge so that it
"accidentally&" rolls off the table to the ground,
where it splats;]

LYDIA
Oh.

BELLA
he joined the church

[she looks at the splatted tomato for a moment,
then resumes]

My fifth son
he also went into business here in town

[she starts to put the polished tomato carefully to one side]

but then he got involved with certain business associates. . .

[she moves her hand out over open space,
pauses a moment,
then drops the tomato with a splat to the ground]

My sixth son
he's married to a German girl.

[splat]

My seventh son
he went to America

[splat]

took his younger brother

[splat]

and then, two years later,
they sent for their brother Guido,
and he went to America, too.

[splat]

My tenth son,
he became a politician.

[she holds the tomato out over the ground for several moments,
in deep anguish,
then shrugs, and splats it]

LYDIA
Excuse me, but....

BELLA
My eleventh son
he is on television

on a soap opera
with the stories of love affairs
and godknows whatnot

[she starts to drop another tomato to the ground,
thinks better of it,
puts it on the table]

he's not killing people

LYDIA
No.

BELLA
My twelfth son
he's not killing anyone either
but he has his love affairs
he argues all the time with his wife
he keeps her like a tramp
he spends all his money
going here and there for soccer games

[she starts to drop another tomato]

but,
a good man is hard to find

[thinks better of it, starts to put it with the others she has saved]

OLYMPIA
That's so true.

BELLA
Still, he's always getting into fights
he comes home in the middle of the night

[starts to drop it again]

nobody's perfect

THYONA

No.

BELLA

[she saves the tomato]

he loves his children

[she saves it]

LYDIA

That's a good thing.

BELLA

My youngest son

he likes to ride the motorcycles

he likes to be in Rome

with the young movie actresses

and the parties

[she starts to splat another tomato,
then takes it back and puts it gently on the table]

he's my baby.

LYDIA

I see.

BELLA

So, what do I have left?

Now you see why I love my Piero so much,

and want to protect him,

my first born,

who is too old for you.

[silence]

You're staying for dinner?

LYDIA

We haven't been invited.

[The uncle, Piero, comes out of the house,
a glass of wine in his hand.]

BELLA

Piero,
you should make them stay for dinner.
They're good girls.

[Bella gathers her tomatoes into her apron]

I never had daughters.
Imagine that.

[Bella leaves.]

PIERO

Giuliano,
mi dispiacce, ma....

[Piero shrugs.]

GIULIANO

Si. Fa niente.

[Giuliano picks up a pail and rag
and cleans up the mess Bella has made.]

Piero speaks to the young women with great warmth,
a welcoming manner, relaxed, a sense of playfulness.

There might be music under this scene,
maybe Molloy's Love's Old Sweet Song
or some champagne music from inside the house.]

PIERO

May I offer you something?

LYDIA

No, thank you.

PIERO

A glass of wine?

OLYMPIA AND THYONA

No, thank you.

PIERO

Coffee? Tea?

LYDIA

No thanks.

PIERO

Something to eat?

LYDIA

No, thank you.

OLYMPIA

Actually,

I don't know how to say this,

I don't want to complain

but you don't seem to have a lot of products.

PIERO

Products?

OLYMPIA

Soaps, you know, and creams,

things like,

LYDIA

Olympia....

OLYMPIA

You know, we've been travelling,
and when you've been travelling
you hope at the end of the journey that you might find
some, like,
Oil of Olay Moisturizing Body Wash
or like
John Freda Sheer Blond Shampoo and Conditioner for Highlighted Blonds

LYDIA

Olympia....

OLYMPIA

I know this is not a hotel, so you wouldn't have everything,
but maybe some Estee Lauder 24 Karat Color Golden Body Creme with Sunbloc,
or Fetish Go Glitter Body Art in Soiree,

LYDIA

Olympia....

OLYMPIA

or some Prescriptives Uplift Eye Cream, not in the tube: firming,
Mac lip gloss in Pink Poodle
just
some things to make a woman feel
you know
fresh

LYDIA

Olympia....

PIERO

I am afraid I don't know about these things,
but I'll ask Giuliano to go out and see what he can find.

OLYMPIA

Thank you.

LYDIA

Really we were mostly hoping to ask you to just: take us in.

PIERO

Take you in?

LYDIA

Your nephew Giuliano says you have some connections.

PIERO

Oh?

LYDIA

And that you can help us.

PIERO

Well, of course, this is a country where people know one another and, Giuliano is right, sometimes these connections can be useful.

If, for example,
you were a member of my family,
certainly I would just take you in.

But

[he shrugs]

I don't know you.

LYDIA

[thinking quickly]

Oh. But.

We are related.

I mean, you know: in some way.

Our people came from Greece to Sicily a long time ago
and to Siracusa

and from Siracusa to Taormina and to the Golfo di Saint'Eufemia
and from there up the coast of Italy to where we are now.

So we are probably members of the same family you and I.

PIERO [amused]

Descended from Zeus, you mean.

OLYMPIA

Yes. We're all sort of goddesses in a way.

PIERO

Indeed. It's very enticing to recover a family connection to Zeus.

And, where is your father, meanwhile?

Is he not able to take care of you?

LYDIA

Our father signed a wedding contract to give us away.

PIERO

To your cousins from Greece.

THYONA

From America.

They went from Greece to America,

and now they're rich

and they think they can come back

and take whatever they want.

PIERO

And the courts in your country:

they would enforce such a contract?

LYDIA

It's an old contract. It seems they will.

We have nothing against men—

OLYMPIA

Not all of us.

LYDIA

but what these men have in mind is not usual.

THYONA

Or else

all too usual.

[silence]

PIERO

You know, as it happens, I have some houseguests here for the weekend
and I would be delighted if you would all join us for dinner,
stay the night if you like
until you get your bearings
but really
as for the difficulties you find yourselves in
disagreeable as they are
and as much as I would like to help
this is not my business.

THYONA

Whose business is it
if not yours?
You're a human being.

OLYMPIA

And a relative.

PIERO

A relative.

THYONA

This is a crisis.

PIERO

And yet...

You know, I am not the Red Cross.

THYONA

And so?

PIERO

So, to be frank,
I can't take in every refugee who comes into my garden.

OLYMPIA

Why not?

PIERO

Because the next thing I know I would have a refugee camp here in my home.
I'd have a house full of Kosovars and Ibo and Tootsies
boat people from China and godknows whatall.

OLYMPIA

That would be nice.

PIERO

I don't think I can open my doors to the whole world.

OLYMPIA

Look at you, you're a rich person.

PIERO

OK. Well, then,
what if I were to say, yes, I can do my part,
in fact, I'm not a bad person entirely,
some people think of me even as a generous person,
and I can help,
but why should I help you?
Shouldn't I rather look around at the world and say:
no, not these people perhaps
but someone else has the greater claim on my attention.

LYDIA

But we are here.

PIERO

Yes?

LYDIA

We are here on your terrace.
Why do you look for someone else?
Look for someone else, too, if you want,
but we are here.

PIERO

And yet I know nothing about this dispute.
I don't know whether these fellows have some rights, too.
What shall I do if they come to me
and say you've abducted our women
give us our women
or we'll shoot you?

LYDIA

Shoot you?

PIERO

What do I know?
I don't know what sort of fellows they are.
I should put myself, perhaps my life on the line—
knowing nothing—
and also the life of my nephew
my brother next door
my brother's sons.

I put their lives on the line
for what?
to save you whom
I've never met before
I don't know what this is about
why would I do this?

LYDIA

Because it's right.

PIERO

I understand it may be right,
but one doesn't always go around doing what's right.
I've never heard of such a thing.
The world is a complicated place.

[silence]

OLYMPIA

It's not that no one's never said no to me,
but I don't think I've ever asked a guy to save me
in a situation like this
and had him say no.

THYONA

There is only one question to ask:
do we want to marry them or not?
No, we don't.
Are you going to let them
drag us away from your house
and do whatever they want with us?

Think of it this way:
if you don't take us in,
my sisters and I will hang ourselves here on your terrace:
fifty dead women hanging in front of your house.

PIERO

Hang yourselves?

THYONA

What choice do we have?

[silence]

LYDIA

Shall we ask your mother what she thinks would be right?

PIERO

You're right.
Of course.
You're right.
I beg your pardon.
Of course I'll take you in.
I don't know what I was thinking.

LYDIA

Thank you.

PIERO

I beg your pardon, really.

I wasn't quite absorbing what it was you were saying.

I'll tell my mother

you will stay for dinner,

and then we'll talk and see what's to be done.

Please, make yourselves at home.

And if there's anything at all you want, please ask.

[he leaves]

OLYMPIA

Now you see, there are men who are kind and decent.

THYONA

Not so kind and decent

if he's not threatened with some kind of scandal of
dead women hanging off his house.

OLYMPIA

I liked him.

You should give a person the benefit of the doubt.

THYONA

You think you found this man's good side.

Men don't have a good side.

OLYMPIA

I've known men who have a good side, Thyona.

LYDIA

I've known men you could sit with after dinner

in front of the fireplace

and just listen to the way he speaks

and hear the gentleness in his way of speaking

and the carefulness

OLYMPIA

I've known men who think,
oh,
a woman,
I'd like to take care of her
not in any way that he thinks he is superior and has control
but in the way that he understands
a woman is a different sort of person
and precious because of that
vulnerable in certain ways because of that
in ways that he isn't
although he might be vulnerable in other ways
because of his stuff that he has
and that he treasures what a woman has
and thinks, oh, if only I could be close to her
and feel what she feels
and see the world as she sees it
how much richer my life would be
and so, because of that, he thinks,
oh, a woman,
I can really respect her
and love her
for who she really is

THYONA

I know a man who will say I want to take care of you
because he means he wants to use you for a while
and while he's using you
so you don't notice what he's doing
he'll take care of you as if you were a new car
before he decides to trade you in.

LYDIA

I've known men like that, too.
But not all men are necessarily the same.
Sometimes you can hear the whole man just in his voice
how deep it is or how frightened
where it stops to think
and how complex and supple and sure it is

OLYMPIA

you can hear the strength in it
and you can know that you're safe

THYONA

The male
the male is a biological accident
an incomplete female
the product of a damaged gene
a half-dead lump of flesh
trapped in a twilight zone somewhere between apes and humans
always looking obsessively for some woman

LYDIA

That's maybe a little bit extreme.

THYONA

any woman
because he thinks if he can make some connection with a woman
that will make him a whole human being!
But it won't. It never will.

Boy babies should be flushed down the toilet at birth.

LYDIA

I know how you feel, Thyona.

OLYMPIA

I've felt that way myself sometimes.

LYDIA

Still, this man who doesn't even know us
who owes us nothing
doesn't know what he risks by offering us a place to stay.
There are places in the world
where refugees are taken in
out of generosity

and often these are men who do the taking in
because people have the capacity for goodness
and there could be a world where people care for one another

[As the speech goes on,
it is joined by the sound of a helicopter overhead
which grows louder and louder,
drowning out Lydia's words even as she goes on shouting them
until the helicopter is deafening
and wind is whipping everyone around so they have to fight to stand up.

Again: the over-the-top extremity of this physical world,
like Thyona throwing plates just when she enters—
should establish the kind of physical piece this is.]

where men are good to women
and there is not a men's history
and a separate women's history
but a human history
where we are all together
and support one another
nurture one another

[Stanley's Trumpet Tune joins the deafening helicopter noise.]

honor one another's differences
and learn to live together
in common justice
reconciling our differences in peaceful conversation
reaching out with goodwill towards one another

[A loudspeaker says:
"STAND BACK. STAND BACK.
STAND AWAY FROM THE HELICOPTER."]

not trying to obliterate those who are not as we are
but learning to understand
learning to take deep pleasure
in the enormous variety of creatures

[She is on the ground toward the end of this speech,
her head lifted up to the sky as she shouts her words
until
finally, she is hunkered down on stage,
her hands over her head;
the helicopter engine is turned off,
and the noise recedes,
and Stanley's Trumpet Tune concludes;
she lifts her head to see that
three guys have entered: NIKOS, CONSTANTINE, and OED;
they wear tuxedos with flowers in their buttonholes
underneath flight suits,
and, as they enter, they are removing their ultra-high-tech flying helmets.
Constantine chews gum.]

Oh, Nikos,
you found us.

NIKOS
Lydia, why did you run away from us?

LYDIA
What?

NIKOS
We were waiting for you at the church.

THYONA
You can't force us to marry you, Nikos.

NIKOS
Force you?
We thought you were coming.

OLYMPIA
Why should we come?

OED
Because we were getting married.

THYONA

We never agreed to marry you.

NIKOS

We have a prenuptial agreement, Lydia.

CONSTANTINE

We have a deal.

THYONA

We never had a deal with you, Constantine.

CONSTANTINE

Your father made a deal with my father
before you were born, Thyona.

You are engaged to me,
and I am going to marry you.

THYONA

This is from the Dark Ages.

NIKOS

Well, if there was some misunderstanding....

THYONA

There was no misunderstanding.

We are not marrying you.

CONSTANTINE

There is a contract involved here.

NIKOS

My brothers and I, we've counted on this all our lives.

And, plus, I thought it would be kind of neat:
a big wedding, fifty brides and fifty grooms,
a real event.

CONSTANTINE

And we never agreed to release you from your promise.

THYONA

Why not?

CONSTANTINE

Because I am a traditional person, Thyona.

I want a traditional marriage,
a traditional wife.

That's the way it is.

THYONA

It's a different world now, Constantine.

You can't just marry someone against their will
because there's been some kind of family understanding.

CONSTANTINE

What do you think?

You think you live in a world nowadays where
you can throw out a promise
just because you don't feel like keeping it?

Just because

drugs are rife

gambling is legal

medicine is euthanasia

birth is abortion

homosexuality is the norm

pornography is piped into everybody's home on the internet

now you think you can do whatever you want

whenever you want to do it

no matter what the law might say?

I don't accept that.

Sometimes I like to lie down at night

with my arms around someone

and KNOW she is there for me

know this gives her pleasure—

my arms around her

her back to me

my stomach pressed against her back

my face buried in her hair
one hand on her stomach
feeling at peace.

That's my plan
to have that.
I'll have my bride.
If I have to have her arms tied behind her back
and dragged to me
I'll have her back.

What is it you women want
you want to be strung up with hoods and gags and blindfolds
stretched out on a board with weights on your chest
you want me to sew your legs to the bed
and pour gasoline on you
and light you on fire
is that what I have to do to keep you?

[silence]

NIKOS
Lydia,
isn't this your wedding dress?

LYDIA
Yes.

NIKOS
It seems you were ready to get married.

CONSTANTINE
The future is going to happen, Thyona,
whether you like it or not.
You say, you don't want to be taken against your will.
People are taken against their will every day.
Do you want tomorrow to come?
Do you want to live in the future?
Never mind. You can't stop the clock.

Tomorrow will take today by force
whether you like it or not.
Time itself is an act of rape.
Life is rape.
No one asks to be born.
No one asks to die.
We are all taken by force, all the time.
You make the best of it.
You do what you have to do.

OLYMPIA

We have an uncle here, Constantine.
and he is going to take care of us.

CONSTANTINE

I am an American now, Olympia.
I'm not afraid of your uncle.
Do you watch television?
Do you see what happens when Americans want something?

[the uncle has entered]

PIERO

Excuse me.
I am Piero. This is my home.
And you would be the cousins of these young women?

NIKOS

We're engaged to be married.

PIERO

I understand the women are no longer interested.

CONSTANTINE

We are not here to negotiate.

PIERO

That's a forthright position.
I like to know where I stand when I deal with a man.

But, before we talk, let me welcome you properly.
Why don't you come into the house with me,
and have a glass of something.

What's your favorite cigar?

Do you like a Cuban?
A Vegas Robaina?
A Partagas?
Is it...?

CONSTANTINE
Constantine.

PIERO
Constantine. And you are...?

OED
Oed.

PIERO
And. . .

NIKOS
Nikos.

PIERO
Nikos. Come with me.
We'll have a glass of something,
have a smoke,
get things sorted out.

NIKOS
I'd like that.

PIERO
Excuse us, ladies.
Come with me.

[He leads them out.]

THYONA

That bastard!

What did I tell you?

OLYMPIA

He's going to solve it peacefully.

THYONA

He's giving in, don't you get it?

These men and their deals.

LYDIA

Right.

You could be right.

OLYMPIA

I don't think he would do that.

THYONA

Sometimes a person can talk a good game,
but when push comes to shove, they're weak right to the core.

OLYMPIA

Except for Constantine.

THYONA

And except for me.

I haven't given in either.

This game isn't over till someone lies on the ground
with the flesh pulled off their bones.

Men.

You think you can do whatever you want with me, think again.

you think that I'm so delicate?

you think you have to care for me?

You throw me to the ground

you think I break?

[she throws herself to the ground]

you think I can't get up again?

you think I can't get up again?

[she gets up]

you think I need a man to save my life?

[she throws herself to the ground again]

I don't need a man!

I don't need a man!

[she gets up and throws herself to the ground again and again as she yells]

These men can fuck themselves!

these men are leeches

these men are parasites

these rapists,

these politicians,

these Breadwinners,

[she is throwing herself to the ground over and over,
letting her loose limbs hit the ground with the rattle of a skeleton's bones,
her head lolling over and hitting the ground with a thwack,
rolling over, bones banging the ground,
back to her feet,
and throwing herself to the ground again in the same way over and over

music kicks in over this—

maybe J.S. Bach's "Sleepers Awake!&" from Cantata No. 140

and, as she hits the ground over and over,

repeating her same litany as she does,

Olympia watches her

and then she joins in,

and starts throwing herself to the ground synchronously

so that it is a choreographed piece

of the two women throwing themselves to the ground,

rolling around, flailing on the ground,
banging angrily on the ground,
rising again and again]

THYONA [yelling simultaneously with Olympia]
these cheap pikers,
these welchers,
these liars,
these double dealers,
flim-flam artists,
litterbugs,
psychiatrists!

[And now Olympia starts to yell, too,
simultaneously with Thyona, on top of her words,
as both of them continue to throw themselves to the ground over and over.]

OLYMPIA
These men!
These men!
All I wanted was a man who could be gentle
a man who likes to cuddle
a man who likes to talk
a man who likes to listen

THYONA
Men who speak when they have nothing to say!
These men should be eliminated!
These men should be snuffed out!
Who needs a man?
Who needs a man?
I'll make it on my own.
I'm an autonomous person!
I'm an independent person!
I can do what I want!
I can be who I am!

OLYMPIA [still yelling simultaneously with Thyona]

And I don't think it's wrong

to lie in the bath

and curl my hair

and paint my nails

to like my clothes

and think they're sexy

and wear short skirts

that blow up in the wind

I don't think it's wrong

for a man to love me

to like to touch me

and listen to me

and talk to me

and write me notes

and give me flowers

because I like men

I like men

And, I like to be submissive.

[and, finally, Lydia joins in, too,

until all three women are yelling their words

over the loud music

and throwing themselves to the ground over and over]

ALL THREE WOMEN TOGETHER

Why can't a man

be more like a woman?

LYDIA

Plainspoken and forthright.

Honest and clear.

Able to process.

To deal with his feelings.

To speak from the heart

to say what he means.

Because if he can

I don't have a grudge

or something against him

we couldn't work out.
I think it's wrong
to make sweeping judgments
write off a whole sex
the way men do to women
we could talk to each other
person to person
get along with each other
then we could go deep
to what a man or a woman
really can be
deep down to the mysteries
of being alive
of knowing ourselves
to know what it is
to live life on earth

[the women work themselves, still in choreographed sync,
to a state of total exhaustion
until one by one, they sprawl on chairs, panting.

Giuliano comes in with a cart piled high with wedding gifts.
Bella enters with him,
also carrying gifts.]

GIULIANO

The wedding presents have come
now that everyone knows where to find you.
Frankly, I've never seen so many gifts
so much silver
so many white things
so much satin ribbon.
Do you think
we could save the ribbon?
Because
I wouldn't mind having the ribbon
I haven't taken any yet
I was going to ask you
if you don't want it

because I have a collection of Barbies and Kens
and this ribbon would go with the whole ensemble
so perfectly
this ensemble that I have
they are all arrayed together with their hands up in the air
because they are doing the firewalking ceremony
and Barbie has her pink feather boa
and her lime green outfit with the flowers at the waist
and the gold bow at the bodice
and Ken is doing the Lambada
so of course they all have mai tais
and they're just having a wonderful time
and their convertible is parked nearby
so you know they can take off to see the sunset any time they want
and when people come over and see my collection
they just say wow
because
because they can't believe I've just done it
but I think if that's who you are
you should just be who you are
whatever that is
just do who you are
because that's why we're here
and if it's you
it can't be wrong.
Some people like to be taken forcibly.
If that's what they like, then that's okay.
And if not, then not.
I myself happen to like it.
To have somebody grab me.
Hold me down.
To know they have to have me
no matter what.
It's not everyone's cup of tea.
Everyone should be free to choose for themselves

OLYMPIA

[picking up one of the wedding gifts]

Plus some of these things are nice.

Can we keep them?

THYONA

No, Olympia.

Not if you aren't getting married.

OLYMPIA

Maybe we should think about it.

Some people go on honeymoons, too.

LYDIA

Olympia.

OLYMPIA

They go to places where there are hammocks and white sand

and people hold them by the waist

and lift them up out of the water

splashing and laughing

and they dive underwater

without the tops to their swimming suits

and the sun sets

and people drink things through straws

LYDIA

Olympia....

OLYMPIA

and they listen to the waves

and even make love in the afternoon

and even like Giuliano says to be submissive

because, to me,

submission is giving up your body,

and your mind and your emotions

and everything

to a someone who can accept all the responsibilities that go with that.

And I myself enjoy the freedom that submission gives me.

I like to be tickled and tortured
and I like to scream and scream
and feel helpless
and be totally controlled
and see how good that makes someone else feel.
It is for me the most natural high.
It is so much better than taking drugs.
You can just relax and enjoy yourself
and feel alive and free inside.

LYDIA

I think we're losing the point.
Like
shouldn't we be leaving?

THYONA

You don't think they'll follow us wherever we go?

BELLA

I had a man once
I was walking along the Appia Antica
and he came along on his motor scooter
and offered me a ride.
A skinny, ugly fellow with dark hair and big ears
and skin so sleek and smooth
I wanted to put my hands on it.
I got on the back of his motor scooter
and ten minutes later
we were in bed together at his mother's house
and I married him
and we had our boys.
All his life he worked
giving the gift of his labor to me
and to our children
he died of a heart attack
while he was out among the trees
harvesting the olives

and
if he came along now
I would get on the scooter again just like the first time.

[Bella plumps down the wedding gifts she was carrying and goes out.

By this time Giuliano is sitting at the piano
and he plays and sings:]

After one whole quart of brandy
like a daisy I'll awake
with no bromo seltzer handy
I don't even shake
Men are not a new sensation
I've done pretty well I think
but this half pint imitation
put me on the blink.

I'm wild again
beguiled again
a simpering, whimpering child again
bewitched, bothered and bewildered
am I

couldn't sleep
and wouldn't sleep
when love came and told me I shouldn't sleep
bewitched, bothered and bewildered
am I

[Two more house guests enter,
Eleanor and Leo,
with arms full of wedding gifts.
She is English; he is Italian.]

ELEANOR
Look, we have more presents.
Are these things for you girls?

THYONA

We're not accepting gifts.

ELEANOR

Not accepting gifts?

Whoever heard of such a thing?

Oh, Leo, these girls!

I suppose they're nervous before the wedding!

LYDIA

We are not nervous.

It's like Thyona says.

We don't want wedding presents!

OLYMPIA

Yet.

ELEANOR

Oh, darling, don't say that.

There are so few occasions
when people give you things
and things are good!

LEO

A bottle of champagne.

Good food.

ELEANOR

A handsome man.

A sunny day.

Life's pleasures,
you can't have too many really.

LEO

When you are young, you think nothing of it.

But the older you get

the more you think: oh, god, let me have more pleasures!

ELEANOR

Don't take me away from the blessed earth
and all its joys.

A swim in the afternoon.

Sex.

A man with a nice nose
a good pair of shoulders
sky blue eyes—

[remembering Leo]

or chocolate brown eyes!

THYONA

Who are you?

ELEANOR

House guests, dear.

Guests of Piero. Eleanor and Leo.

And you're the brides?

THYONA

No.

OLYMPIA

We're still sort of thinking about it.

ELEANOR

How exciting for Piero to have a wedding for us.

To me, it just makes a perfect weekend.

LEO

I always say:

you need to embrace life.

ELEANOR

You need to let it in through every pore.

LEO

We come this way but once
this brief, brief time on earth
we need to suck it in.
The key thing is
you'll be wanting to let go of fear

ELEANOR

throw yourself into life

LEO

put all your fears and pain in a garbage can
and attach the garbage can to a yellow balloon
filled with helium
and let it go!

Love,
love touches,
love fondles,
love listens to its own needs.

THYONA

What is it with you Italian guys?
You spout this kind of bullshit
and all you're ever thinking is,
if I keep up this line of chatter,
can I pinch some woman's butt?

ELEANOR

Isn't that the truth?
And if you smile
or simply return a look with a look
you find you've sealed your fate
you've fallen into life way over your head
nothing is held back
like a Roman fountain
all splash and burble
and you find yourself carried off
or even to walk through a crowd

you're in constant contact
with all sorts of elbows and knees
and souls and buttocks
touching and rubbing
everything that in another minute will all be naked.

I just think everything is shocking in Italy,
and I'm not a puritan
I mean, of course, I am a puritan,
but that's what I love about Italy,
because here, I am not a puritan.
I am alive. I love life. I take it in,
its tomatoes, its sunshine,

LEO
its olive oil,

ELEANOR
its paintings, its men

LEO
everything is as though a giant mother
were squashing you to her breast.

ELEANOR
In Italy, to go out
is to come home.

OLYMPIA
I'd like to take it in.
You know, I wouldn't mind, like,
going swimming even.
Plus guys.
I don't have a problem with guys.

THYONA

I don't have a problem with guys either.
This is not about sunshine and olive oil.
This is about guys hauling you off to their cave.

LYDIA [to Leo]

Still.
You remind me of my father.
So kind and gentle.
So full of enthusiasm.

[Music.

Handel's Air from Water Music, Suite No. 1.

Lydia and Leo dance,
a long, long, slow, intimate, heartbreaking father/daughter dance.

The others are all silent,
respectful of the moment.
They stand watching.

And when the dance is ended,
and the music stops,
there is a moment of silence before Giuliano speaks
meditatively—
or, if it seems good, Giuliano can start speaking while they are still dancing.]

GIULIANO

I knew a man once
so kind and generous.
I was a boy
I was on a train going to Brindisi
and he said, I'm going to marry you.
He asked how far I was going.
To Rome, I said.
No, no, he said,
you can't get off so soon,
you need to go with me to Bologna.
He wouldn't hear of my getting off in Rome

or he would get off, too, and meet my family.
He gave me a pocket watch
and a silk scarf
and a little statue of a saint
he had picked up in Morocco.
He quoted Dante to me
and sang bits of Verdi and Puccini.
He was trying everything he knew
to make me laugh and enjoy myself.
But, finally,
he seemed so insistent
that I grew frightened of him.
He never touched me,
but he made me promise, finally,
that I would come to Bologna in two weeks time
after I had seen my family.
I promised him,
because I thought he might not let me get off the train
unless I promised.
He gave me his address, which of course I threw away,
and I gave a false address to him.
And when I got off the train,
I saw that he was weeping.
And I've often thought,
oh, well,
maybe he really did love me
maybe that was my chance
and I ran away from it
because
I didn't know it at the time.

OLYMPIA

I think,
for me,
there's nothing quite like it
when you know a person is attracted to you

and you look into his eyes and see your own reflection
through the tears of joy in his eyes,

as you've always wanted to see yourself,
and never have since you were a child
just sharing the daily things with another person
knowing you can count on him.
And I know he loves me all the time,
hugging me all day
treating me as though I were precious.

THYONA

You are a twit.

OLYMPIA

I am not.

THYONA

I'll tell you something, Olympia.
You're the kind of person
who ends up in the bottom of a ravine somewhere
with your underpants over your head.
I'm trying to save your neck
and you don't even get it!

OLYMPIA

Oh!

What did I say wrong?

THYONA

Do you think I like feeling this way?
do you think it feels good to feel bad all the time
do you think I wouldn't rather just be a nice, happy
well-adjusted seeming person
who can just take it as it comes and like it?
But I can't just not be honest.
Do you think that makes me happy?
To spend my whole life on earth
the only life I'm going to have
feeling angry?

[she turns and runs out]

OLYMPIA

Thyona!

[she runs after Thyona;

Nikos enters, shyly, stands to one side.

Eleanor and Leo hold a moment, seeing Nikos and Lydia looking at each other.]

ELEANOR

Come, Leo.

Let's leave them alone.

[Eleanor and Leo leave.]

NIKOS

I'm sorry

for the way Constantine seemed a little rude.

Well,

I shouldn't put it all on him.

I'm sorry for the way that we've behaved.

LYDIA

Thank you for saying so, Nikos.

NIKOS

I thought,

I've always liked you, Lydia

seeing you with your sisters

sometimes in the summers

when our families would get together at the beach.

I thought you were fun, and funny

and really good at volleyball

LYDIA

Volleyball?

NIKOS

which I thought showed you have a
well,
a natural grace
and beauty
and a lot of energy.

LYDIA

Oh.

NIKOS

And it's not that I thought I fell in love with you at the time
or that I've been like a stalker or something in the background
all these years.

LYDIA

No, I never....

NIKOS

But really, over the years,
I've thought back from time to time
how good it felt just to be around you.

LYDIA

Oh.

NIKOS

And so I thought: well, maybe this is an okay way
to have a marriage

LYDIA

A marriage.

NIKOS

to start out
not in a romantic way, but
as a friendship

LYDIA

Oh.

NIKOS

because I admire you

and I thought perhaps this might grow
into something deeper
and longer lasting

LYDIA

Oh.

NIKOS

but maybe this isn't quite the thing you want
and really I don't want to force myself on you
you should be free to choose
I mean: obviously.

LYDIA

Thank you.

NIKOS

Although I think I should say
what began as friendship for me
and a sort of distant, even inattentive regard
has grown into a passion already

LYDIA

A passion.

NIKOS

I don't know how
or where it came from, or when
but somehow the more I felt this admiration
and, well, pleasure in you

LYDIA

Pleasure.

NIKOS

seeing you become the person that you are
I think a thoughtful person and smart
and it seems to me funny and warm

LYDIA

Funny.

NIKOS

and passionate, I mean about the things
I heard you talk about in school
a movie or playing the piano
I saw you one night at a cafe by the harbor
drinking almond nectar
and I saw that happiness made you raucous.
And I myself don't want to have a relationship
that's cool or distant
I want a love really that's all-consuming
that consumes my whole life

LYDIA

Your whole life.

NIKOS

and the longer the sense of you has lived with me
the more it has grown into a longing for you
so I wish you'd consider
maybe not marriage
because it's true you hardly know me
but a kind of courtship

LYDIA

A courtship.

NIKOS

or, maybe you'd just I don't know
go sailing with me or see a movie

LYDIA

Gee, Nikos,
you seem to talk a lot.

NIKOS

I talk too much.
I'm sorry.

LYDIA

Sometimes it seems to me
men get all caught up
in what they're doing
and they forget to take a moment
and look around
and see what effect they're having
on other people.

NIKOS

That's true.

LYDIA

They get on a roll.

NIKOS

I do that sometimes.
I wish I didn't.
But I get started on a sentence,
and that leads to another sentence,
and then, the first thing I know,
I'm just trying to work it through,
the logic of it,
follow it through to the end
because I think,
if I stop,
or if I don't get through to the end
before someone interrupts me
they won't understand what I'm saying
and what I'm saying isn't necessarily wrong—
it might be, but not necessarily,

and if it is, I'll be glad to be corrected,
or change my mind—
but if I get stopped along the way
I get confused
I don't remember where I was
or how to get back to the end of what I was saying.

LYDIA

I understand.

NIKOS

And I think sometimes I scare people
because of it
they think I'm so, like determined
just barging ahead—
not really a sensitive person,
whereas, in truth,
I am.

LYDIA

I know.

Do you know about dreams?

NIKOS

Well, I have dreams.

LYDIA

But do you know what they mean?

NIKOS

I don't know. Maybe.

LYDIA

I had this dream
I was going to a wedding
of these old friends of mine
and part of the wedding—uh, sort of event—
was an enormous pond that they had built,

and I was late getting to the wedding
so I got someone to airlift me in,
and I dove into the pond but,
when I landed in the water,
the walls of the pond collapsed and it drained out
and 1500 fish died,
and everyone was looking for survivors
but I had to leave to take Yeltsin to the Museum of Modern Art,
because I had to get to the gym.

So, when I took him in to one of the exhibits
and turned around to hug him goodbye,
he turned to my mother and said,
"Wow, look at that Julian Schnabel bridge.&"
There was an enormous sterling silver bridge
designed by Julian Schnabel.
So I walked my mother into the water to say goodbye to her,
and this immense 25-story high tidal wave crashed over me
and threw me up over the Julian Schnabel bridge
and then I was completely alone in the middle of the ocean
until I realized:
I had the cell phone tucked into my undies.
So I phoned Olympia to come and get me,
and she said, oh, perfect, I'll send Chopin—
which is the name of her dog—
I'll send Chopin over in the car,
and then would you take him for a walk
and leave the car on 8th avenue?

What do you think of that?

NIKOS

Well,

I think things happen so suddenly sometimes.

LYDIA

Sometimes people don't want to fall in love.

Because when you love someone

it's too late to set conditions.

You can't say
I'll love you if you do this
or I'll love you if you change that
because you can't help yourself
and then you have to live
with whoever it is you fall in love with
however they are
and just put up with the difficulties you've made for yourself
because true love has no conditions.
That's why it's so awful to fall in love.

[The heartbreaking music of the Largo
from Bach's "Air on the Gstring"
and after a moment,
Lydia and Nikos dance—a long, long, sweet dance.

And then, when they stop at last:]

LYDIA
What would you like to do with me?

NIKOS
I'd like to kiss you.

LYDIA
Kiss you? But I don't even know you.

NIKOS
Well, if you'd kiss me, then you'd know me.

[they kiss;

they part;

she looks at him,

and then she turns and runs out.]

NIKOS

Oh.

God.

God.

Goddammit.

[he throws himself to the ground]

Goddammit!

[he gets up;

Constantine enters, sees Nikos;

Nikos whirls and throws himself to the ground again]

NIKOS

Goddammit.

CONSTANTINE

Goddammit.

[Nikos gets up;

Constantine saunters over to stand next to Nikos.]

CONSTANTINE

This is how it is.

NIKOS

Yes, this is how it is.

Goddammit!

[Nikos throws himself to the ground again;

Constantine hesitates a moment; then throws himself to the ground, too,

in imitation of Nikos—not that he, Constantine, has any particular agenda about it.

Music.

Marc-Antoine Charpentier's Prelude to Te Deum at full volume
so that hardly any of the following words can be heard.

Oed enters.

he sees Nikos and Constantine
and stands watching them out of curiosity.

Nikos and Constantine continue to throw themselves to the ground over and over
as they
talk/shout.]

NIKOS

When I was a boy I thought
I had it made.
My coach said to me
you could be good.

CONSTANTINE

damned good

NIKOS

I had the instincts.
I could hit the ball.

CONSTANTINE

I could hit the ball.

NIKOS

I could run.

CONSTANTINE

I could run

NIKOS

My dad played football.

CONSTANTINE

My dad played football.

[working along at this kind of rhythm

Constantine repeats the words of Nikos that are underlined;

and sometimes he can take just one thought, such as "jerk" or "big man"

and keep yelling it over and over while Nikos goes on with the rest of what he is saying;

or sometimes he says it simultaneously or nearly simultaneously with Nikos;

and, pretty soon,

Oed joins in,

yelling out the words and phrases that are underlined

sometimes simultaneously with Nikos and Constantine,

or at different moments,

so it is a chaos of three talking at once,

but we can hear it because it is the same phrase repeated]

Then everybody told me

you're just a jerk

this macho stuff

big man

bullshit

and then I thought

my instincts are off

my instincts are all off

[he's starting to cry now]

I thought: girls will like this

but they didn't

so I hung out with these guys

it wasn't what I had in mind

and all the fun had gone

pretty soon I couldn't hit

I couldn't catch

I was slowing down

[as he continues

and as he and Constantine continue to throw themselves to the ground in synch,
Oed joins them;
now all three men are throwing themselves to the ground
over and over and over
in synchronization,
while they yell the dialogue,
now Constantine and Nikos picking up phrases from Oed to repeat;

although, with the music deafening now,
we can't hear more than occasional words or phrases]

OED[shouting, as the action continues]

You should have gone to your dad
you think no one could understand
but you can talk about these things
to other men
because, these men,
they understand
because this is what it is to be a man
men know about this
because they have gone through it
and they remember
they know the pain,
they don't want to talk about it
they try to hide it
but if you open up to them
they'll open up right back

[Oed rips off his shirt and throws it to the floor, picks up circular saw blades, one after another, from a pile of saw blades, and hurls them across the stage so they stick in the side of another building that has been wheeled into place, yelling, for no good reason other than that he has gotten himself worked up; he is hopping mad, throwing a saw blade, then jumping into the air and stomping back down on the ground and yelling.

Constantine cuts out of the synchronized collapsing and starts jumping up in the air and landing with apparent full force on Nikos's splayed body, as Nikos rolls over and over on the stage, and Constantine yells, on top of the other yelling:]

CONSTANTINE

Girls are socialized
so they want a man to be older
take charge
have money
have status
while they play hard to get
and boys are taught to feel stupid
feel inferior
not as smart as girls
then hormones happen
a boy wants a girl
she plays hard to get
so a boy learns to
talk big
develop a line
take all the risk
hit on women
not take the answer no
look for younger women
go for status jobs
how do the women
handle men like this?
they get more hostile
more aloof
they wear high heels
they diet too much
they hate themselves
they blame the men
the men hate them
it's a vicious circle
it's a vicious circle
so fuck these women
fuck these women

NIKOS [continuing simultaneously with Constantine, as the action continues]

I said to my dad
I don't want to do this
this isn't me

I felt so ashamed
He said, what do you mean?
your friends out there
they're doing it
they like it
just get in there
don't be afraid
you can't get hurt
if you get hurt
it doesn't matter
that's how it is
you pick yourself up get on with it
what do you care
because you belong
but I never did belong
it never was for me
Little League never was for me

[The music is drowning out all the speech
and finally, it comes to an end.

Silence.

The men stand panting, embarrassed, looking at one another.
Constantine and Nikos are weeping.

Oed snatches up his shirt from the ground and struts out in a huff.

Constantine kicks the ground over and over—releasing the last spasms of rage, like
little aftershocks, to finally settle down.

Nikos watches him.

Finally, Constantine speaks very quietly.]

CONSTANTINE
People think
it's hard to be a woman;
but it's not easy

to be a man,
the expectations people have
that a man should be a civilized person
of course I think everyone should be civilized
men and women both
but when push comes to shove
say you have some bad people
who are invading your country
raping your own wives and daughters
and now we see:
this happens all the time
all around the world
and then a person wants a man
who can defend his home

you can say, yes, it was men who started this
there's no such thing as good guys and bad guys
only guys
and they kill people
but if you are a man who doesn't want to be a bad guy
and you try not to be a bad guy
it doesn't matter
because even if it is possible to be good
and you are good
when push comes to shove
and people need defending
then no one wants a good guy any more

then they want a man who can fuck someone up
who can go to his target like a bullet
burst all bonds
his blood hot
howling up the bank
rage in his heart
screaming
with every urge to vomit
the ground moving beneath his feet
the earth alive with pounding

the cry hammering in his heart
like tanked up motors turned loose
with no brakes to hold them

this noxious world

and then when it's over
suddenly
when this impulse isn't called for any longer
a man is expected to put it away
carry on with life
as though he didn't have such impulses
or to know that, if he does
he is a despicable person
and so it may be that when a man turns this violence on a woman
in her bedroom
or in the midst of war
slamming her down, hitting her,
he should be esteemed for this
for informing her
about what it is that civilization really contains
the impulse to hurt side by side with the gentleness
the use of force as well as tenderness
the presence of coercion and necessity
because it has just been a luxury for her really
not to have to act on this impulse or even feel it
to let a man do it for her
so that she can stand aside and deplore it
whereas in reality
it is an inextricable part of the civilization in which she lives
on which she depends
that provides her a long life, longer usually than her husband,
and food and clothes
dining out in restaurants
and going on vacations to the oceanside
so that when a man turns it against her
he is showing her a different sort of civilized behavior really
that she should know and feel intimately
as he does

to know the truth of how it is to live on earth
to know this is part not just of him
but also of her life
not go through life denying it
pretending it belongs to another
rather knowing it as her own
feeling it as her own
feeling it as a part of life as intense as love
as lovely in its way as kindness
because to know this pain
is to know the whole of life
before we die
and not just some pretty piece of it
to know who we are
both of us together
this is a gift that a man can give a woman.

[Constantine finally leaves—pushing Nikos on his way out.
Nikos hustles to catch up to Constantine, and gives him a shove.
Constantine shoves back.
They leave shoving one another back and forth.

Eleanor enters, with Olympia helping her,
carrying a huge wedding cake.]

ELEANOR

Let's put it here, dear,
over here.

OLYMPIA

Does it have candles?

ELEANOR

No, dear, no.
Usually it has a little bride and groom on top
but this time we need fifty little brides and fifty little grooms
so we will have them all around on all the different tiers
and it will be like a huge party
like Carnival.

OLYMPIA

I would like candles.

ELEANOR

Oh, candles. You want candles. Yes.

Of course, love. Think nothing of it.

You'll have candles if you want them.

[Thyona enters.]

THYONA

We don't want a cake.

What are you doing, Olympia,
helping with this cake?

LYDIA

Did someone order a cake?

ELEANOR

It was delivered to the house.

LYDIA

I thought there were some conversations to be had.

THYONA

What's going on?

LYDIA

Things are moving awfully fast.

PIERO [entering with a glass of brandy in hand]

I ordered the cake.

Thank you, Eleanor.

ELEANOR

Any time, dear.

I'm just going to get some candles for the cake.

[she leaves]

THYONA

So.

You gave in to them, didn't you?

PIERO

I thought I might be able to strike an accomodation
with your cousins.

THYONA

An accomodation?

PIERO

In the world I come from

it's not always all or nothing.

Men learn to compromise all the time.

After all we have to go on living in the same world together.

THYONA

So you get up every morning and say

who can I compromise with today?

Surely there's a sociopath somewhere who wants to make a deal.

PIERO [ignoring her]

Frankly, I could see why you wouldn't want to accept
the proposal of your cousins

50 grooms for 50 brides

in its entirety.

But it seemed to me that this young man Nikos,
was not such a bad a fellow after all.

THYONA

They're all the same

just different manners.

PIERO [ignoring her still]

And I thought it might be

that there could be one or two others like Nikos,

and, that, if one were to find them,
there might be some room to negotiate.

THYONA
To negotiate?

PIERO
To see whether there might be one or two natural alliances.

OLYMPIA
I'd like to love the person that I marry.

PIERO
Yes, we all would. To be sure.
And sometimes we do—at first.
Sometimes it lasts a little bit.

OLYMPIA
I know people who have loved one another
all their lives.

PIERO
I do, too.
And yet, it's very rare.
For the rest of us,
we make do.

THYONA
Maybe some of us don't want to be married at all.

PIERO
I thought that could be an option, too.
And yet,
for some of you—
having a family is something you might long for as much as I do.
To be close for all your lives
to another human being
and to the children that you have together
coming through pleasures and pain over the years

that bring you closer together
closer to knowing the deepest truth of life
that life is nothing for us
but an experience that we share with others.
And, if we want our experience of life to be deep
and passionate,
to have a sense of its unfolding over many years
to be in touch with the whole of it
as we grow old,
a lifelong marriage some of us will welcome.

THYONA

What are you saying?

PIERO

It seemed to me
you might say to these fellows,
look, the deal as a whole is no good,
but we'll take 50% of you
or 10%.

THYONA

What?

PIERO

Of the fifty of you young women,
I felt sure there must be some
who still wished to be married to these young men.

And that was the accomodation I tried to arrange.

THYONA

Take 50%. Take 10%.

This is insane.

What is this?

We'll make some package deal?

LYDIA

Is Nikos part of this?

THYONA

And what about Constantine?

Is he part of the deal?

Am I part of the deal or not?

PIERO

We didn't get that far.

THYONA

Didn't get that far?

How long does it take to get that far?

These men think they can do anything.

OLYMPIA

I'm not afraid of men, Thyona.

In fact, I kind of like them.

THYONA

So?

OLYMPIA

Maybe you think I shouldn't play their game, but

I think I'm not a helpless victim.

When I put on a short skirt and paint my toe nails
and dye my hair

I don't think that I'm a twit.

I think men know what I'm doing

and they think it's fun

and I think it's fun, too,

and I think I'm an equal

in the game we play.

I wouldn't mind some sort of negotiation.

THYONA

We don't accept your deal.

You can tell these men we don't accept it.

What we would accept is

if these men like

they can come to us one by one

and beg us to marry them
give each one of us time to make up our minds
postpone the wedding day
let us consider and reconsider
let us think about it when we are on our own ground
when we are strong and they are weak
let us come to them one by one
and say freely if we want to marry them
otherwise there's nothing to be said

OLYMPIA
Except....

THYONA
Nothing.
We reject your offer.

LYDIA
Thyona....

THYONA
I speak for all of us.

LYDIA
Thyona....

PIERO
I'm sorry to tell you
what I have been saying,
this is only the accomodation I was trying to work out.
In fact, Constantine won't have it either,
and he speaks for all your cousins.
Your cousins will marry you
whether you want to marry them or not.
None of you has a choice.

[silence]

LYDIA

And Nikos?

What did Nikos have to say?

PIERO

He let his brother speak for him.

LYDIA

Oh.

THYONA

Isn't this just what I said?

LYDIA

Yes.

[silence;

then, defeated, to Piero]

Well, this is why we came to you.

Thank God

we were lucky enough to come here.

Thank God we found you.

PIERO

I wish, in fact, you had found someone else.

Because I can't protect you.

I can't put my home at risk

my home and my family.

My nephew.

The daughters of my brother.

I can't do it.

I'm sorry.

For me, that never was an option.

The wedding will take place today.

The arrangements have been made.

[He leaves;

silence.]

OLYMPIA

Who am I supposed to marry, then?
This is no different than it would be
if we were lying in our beds
and soldiers came through the door
and took whoever it was they wanted.

I'm not going to do this.

LYDIA

What else can you do?

THYONA

What else can you do
if your father won't protect you
your country won't defend you
you flee to another country
and no one there will take care of you
what is left?

Nothing except to take care of yourself.

[silence]

We have no country.
We have become our own country now
where we make the laws ourselves.

LYDIA

Right.

OLYMPIA

Right.

THYONA

And when these men take us to bed
on our wedding night
these men who left us no alternative
these men who force themselves on us,
we will meet force with force
and we will kill them
one by one.

LYDIA

What?

OLYMPIA

Kill them?

LYDIA

Kill them?

OLYMPIA

I can't kill them.
Are you crazy?

THYONA

Would you kill them if they were soldiers
coming through your bedroom door?

OLYMPIA

Of course I would.
But to kill them.

LYDIA

We can't kill them.

THYONA

What choice did they give you
but to stop them
the only way they ever will be stopped.
All these men understand is force.

LYDIA

But to kill them?

At the least maybe we don't want to kill them all.

OLYMPIA

Maybe some of them are good.

THYONA

None of them are good.

LYDIA

How can you say that?

THYONA

Here's how you can tell:

none of them objected to Constantine,

not one of them stood up against him and said:

No, Constantine,

let's take this deal,

or let's at least negotiate,

let's talk to these sisters and see if one or two of them wants to marry us

and let the rest go free

let those go free who don't want to marry.

Take the risk that some of us will be rejected.

No, no one stood up against him.

All his brothers are his silent partners.

Would you want to live with someone

who just gives in like this?

Would you ever be safe with a person as weak as this?

[silence]

LYDIA

No.

THYONA

They have all gone along with this.

They have made their decision.

The only question is:

Will you defend yourself
and defend your sisters?

[silence]

OLYMPIA

Lydia?

Lydia?

LYDIA

Yes.

THYONA

Olympia?

OLYMPIA

Yes.

THYONA

We have a pact then.

Not one groom will live through his wedding night,
not one.

Are we agreed?

LYDIA

Yes.

OLYMPIA

Yes.

[Eleanor enters.]

ELEANOR

I'm going to help you girls get dressed
for the wedding.

[through the following,

Eleanor helps the women get into their petticoats and dresses,
veils and garters and shoes
and powder and lipstick and rouge.

As the brides dress to kill,
sweet music plays,
J.S. Bach's Air on the G string, from Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D,
while Giuliano,
who at first has helped Eleanor bring in clothes for the brides,
goes off on his own transvestite solo dance]

LYDIA

Sometimes I feel as though I'm standing on a thousand dinner plates
on the side of a muddy hill
and my job is to keep from sliding down the hill!

OLYMPIA

Nothing seems to be working out.
I was hoping for a wedding dress from Monique Lhuillier,
but back home in Greece,
all I could find was an Alvina Valenta,
not even a Vera Wang
and I'd been planning all my life
or most of it
for something with little spaghetti straps
and some lace right on the bodice
and little lace flowers just where the straps join the bodice
and people said sometimes you just have to settle
but I don't want to
I don't think I have to settle
I don't see why
at least on my wedding day
I can't have things exactly the way I want them!

ELEANOR

Never mind, dear.

You're going to love the way you look
by the time we're finished.

What lovely faces you all have
I think myself
if I'd had such a complexion
I'd have been married seven times by now.

What I always say is:
if both of you are physically fit
you should lie face downward on the bed
legs hanging over the edge
and let him help you raise your legs
and wrap them around his waist or shoulders
or if you like
you can start on the floor
and let him lift your ankles
while you walk around the floor on your hands
because I think you'll find
this makes for very deep penetration—
some say the very deepest.

LYDIA

Probably this is how people feel when they're drowning!

ELEANOR

Now, I suppose you might be saying to yourselves
before we make the final decision,
let's ask ourselves:
Do we have similar backgrounds?
Do we agree on our religious beliefs?
Do we have the same ideals and standards and tastes?
Are we real friends?
Do we have a real happiness in being together,
talking, or just doing nothing together?
Do we have a feeling of paired unity?

[The wedding music begins at full volume:
Wagner's "Wedding March" from Lohengrin.

In stately fashion
the grooms enter in a line, wearing tuxedos:
50 grooms (or a few more grooms, in the economical production),
led by Constantine and Nikos.

And our three brides take their places
and they are followed by their
47 (or several more) sisters, all in wedding dresses,
who enter in a stately manner.

Finally,
Eleanor cuts the wedding cake
and hands a piece of cake to Olympia
who feeds it to Oed,
crushing it playfully into his mouth;
he smiles at this,
takes her in his arms
and dances with her.

Lydia does the same with the cake with Nikos,
and they dance.
Thyona does the same,
but mashing the whole piece of cake all over Constantine's face.

Constantine retaliates by picking Thyona up
and shoving her head-first into the wedding cake.
She recovers and wrestles him head-first into the cake.

He takes off his jacket
as though to start a real fight with her.

She pulls up her wedding dress
to show her bare butt to him
and to do a seductive-hostile butt dance
while she faces upstage.

The music segues into the exuberant party music
of Handel's "Arrival of the Queen of Sheba" from Solomon.

Constantine, taking Thyona's dance as a seductive challenge,
undoes his tie,
unbuttons his shirt,
and joins the dance with Thyona.

As her dance gets increasingly lewd and hostile
he takes off his shirt
and then his shoes
and then his pants
until he is doing a complete, abandoned striptease

while the others have moved into throwing themselves to the floor
and throwing themselves down on top of one another
or throwing one another to the floor
and then jumping on the one who lies there

—as the music segues into the wild, violent, dionysian
Widor's "Toccata" from Organ Symphony No. 5—

and, of all the brides and grooms, some are

burning themselves with cigarettes

lighting their hands on fire and standing with their hands burning

throwing plates and smashing them

throwing kitchen knives

taking huge bites of food
and having to spit it out at once, vomiting

Not these things necessarily, but things like these, things as extreme as these:
one groom lying across two chairs—his head on one, his feet on the other, dropping
bowling balls on his stomach and letting them roll onto the floor

one groom on his back on the ground,
a board filled with nails resting on his naked chest;
another groom putting an anvil on the board,
and then hammering the anvil with a sledgehammer

one groom with his feet locked into moon boots nailed to the ground
and he is rocking violently back and forth

one bride slamming her head repeatedly in a door

Eleanor screaming, running from side to side, and smashing plates and cups

Some of the wedding guests are enjoying themselves;
so that, as at any wedding reception,
there is also joy, and warm sentiment, and sentimentality,
people happy,
young people in love,
quiet conversations, laughter,
older people remembering happy times.

If there is a cast of hundreds,
Leo can re-appear as a character now
and dance with the brides, one after another,
as though he is their father.

It may be that Constantine is the groom who should
have his feet in the moon boots
so that he is naked now, rocking back and forth violently,
when Thyona
comes to him with a kitchen knife
and stabs him in the heart
so that blood floods over his chest and stomach
and onto her white dress

and the other brides pull out kitchen knives
and murder their husbands, one by one,
all of them splashing their white wedding dresses with blood

and one of them circling round and round the stage

holding his crotch
and he, too, bleeds and bleeds,
circling dizzily,
finally coming to his knees,
continuing on his knees.

And, all this while,
Lydia and Nikos are off to one side
making love.

(NOTE:
while the Widor may be the best music for the large cast, a small cast production
might need a more controlled music to go with the more ritualized murders, so we
might think of having Bella singing Ave Maria or Handel's "Pena tiranna"; from
Amadigi.)

A little before the music ends,
all the violent action on stage has subsided.

Thyona drags Constantine's body downstage
and throws it into the orchestra pit
(or else, a trap door opens, she dumps him in the hole,
and the trap door accomodatingly closes again).

People lie or sprawl, exhausted.

Only Lydia and Nikos are moving, gently,
with one another.

Piero enters — with Guiliano —
a cup of espresso in his hand,
and walks among the bodies,
in shock and dismay.

Bella enters from the other side.
People begin to stir.]

PIERO
GUILIANO, mi dispiacce, ma . . .

(he gestures to the carnage.)

GUILIANO

Si, si. Lascia me.

(he starts to pick things up.)

BELLA

Piero

you should have stopped this.

PIERO

What,

what could I have done?

BELLA

Piero....

THYONA

Lydia!

Lydia!

Who is that with you?

[all eyes turn to Lydia and Nikos]

LYDIA

This is Nikos,

my husband.

THYONA

Your husband?

LYDIA

Yes.

THYONA

You didn't kill him?

LYDIA

I love him, Thyona.

OLYMPIA

You broke your word?

LYDIA

I couldn't do it.

THYONA

We all agreed what we were going to do!

LYDIA

I love him!

THYONA

You love him?

LYDIA

I'm sorry, Thyona,
I couldn't help myself.

THYONA

You go behind our backs.
You break your promise.
You betray your sisters,
and you're sorry?
In any civilized society
you would be put on trial.
And hanged probably.
Or electrocuted.

PIERO

Now. Now. Let's just stop where we are.

THYONA

We are not finished here.

PIERO

Let's just slow things down.
Everyone deserves a fair trial, after all.

THYONA

Oh! Right! Right! OK.
We'll put Lydia on trial.
And we will be the jury.

PIERO

You'll be the jury?

BELLA

And I will be the judge.

(silence)

PIERO

The judge?

THYONA

You?

BELLA

Yes.

Who else?

[to Piero]

You want to put it in the hands of some judge
chosen by the business associates of your brother?

I don't think so.

I will be the judge.

Is that okay with you?

LYDIA

Yes. Good. I agree to that.

OLYMPIA

I agree to that, too.

THYONA

All right, then.

Betrayal is the charge.

What Lydia did, in any other country,
would be treason.

LYDIA

I love him.

I have nothing more to say.

Olympia, how could you just kill someone
You're just a girl.

OLYMPIA

I was confused.

LYDIA

How could you be confused?

OLYMPIA

I thought you said it was a good idea, Lydia.
Remember, you said you agreed?

LYDIA

I had to agree with the argument the way Thyona put it,
But if we live in a world where it is not possible
to love another person
I don't want to live.

THYONA

All this talk of love.

In the real world,

if there is no justice

there can be no love

because there can be no love

that is not freely offered

and it cannot be free

unless every person has equal standing.

[What follows is not a reasoned argument
but a rush of judgment
that pours out faster than she can think about it.]

First comes justice,
and if there is no justice
then those who are being taken advantage of
have every right
to take their oppressors
to take those who stand in their way
and drive them across the fields
like frightened horses
to set fire to their houses
to ruin everything that comes to hand
to hurl their corpses into wells
where once there were houses
to leave rubble
smoldering woodpiles
to leave shattered stones,
empty streets,
and silence
no living thing
no bird, no animal
no dogs,
no children,
not one stone left standing on another,
rather a wilderness of stones
and see if finally then
a lesson has been learned.
Because there are times
when this is justified
there are times, though you may not like it,
when this is all that human beings may rightly do and to shrink from it
is to be less than human.

LYDIA

You know, everything you say may be right, Thyona
but I have to ask myself,
if it is
then why don't I feel good about it?
I have to somehow go on my gut instincts
because sometimes
you can convince yourself in your mind
about the rightness of a thing
and you try to find fault with your reasoning
but you can't
because
no matter how you turn it over in your mind
it comes out right
and so you think:
I know it's right but I don't think it is
or I think it's right but I know it isn't
and you could end up thinking
you're just a moron
or some sort of deficient sort of thing
but really there are some things
when you want to know the truth of them
you have to use not just your mind or even your mind and your feelings
but your neurons or your cells or whatever
to make some decisions
because they are too complicated
they need to be considered in some larger way
and in the largest way of all
I know I have to go with my whole being
when it says I love him and he loves me
and nothing else matters
even if other things do matter even quite a lot
even if I'm doing this in the midst of everyone getting killed
I can't help myself
and I don't think I should.
Probably this is how people end up marrying Nazis
but I can't help it.

THYONA

You should.

You should.

LYDIA

I couldn't!

OLYMPIA

Lydia!

If I'd known it was okay to do what you did,

I might have loved someone, too.

I was just

I know everyone says this

but the truth is

I was just following orders in a way.

I should kill myself probably

now that I see the kind of person that I am.

BELLA

That's enough now.

That's enough.

I'm ready with my verdict.

This is what I have to say.

[silence]

You did a dreadful thing, you women, when you killed these men.

What could be worse than to take another's life?

And yet,

you came to us,

to my family and to me,

to help you, and we failed you.

We share the blame with you.

What else could you have done?

You women made your own laws because you had no others to protect you.

This was your social contract.

And Lydia, in her betrayal of your pact,
imperilled all of you.
I understand what you say.

And yet,
you can't condemn your sister.
No matter what.

She chose love.
She reached out
she found another person—
and she embraced him.

[Thyona turns her back
and takes several steps to the side, facing away.
Bella continues her argument, to persuade Thyona and Olympia.]

She couldn't know
when she did
whether all the hopes of her childhood for true love and tenderness
for a soulmate for all her life
were destined for disillusion.

Still, she reached out.

And, if we cannot embrace another
what hope do we have of life?
What hope is there to survive at all?

[spoken out, as though from a judge's bench]

This is why: love trumps all.
Love is the highest law.

It can be bound by no other.
Love of another human being—
man or woman—
it cannot be wrong.

Does this mean every woman must get married?

Not at all.

A woman might want another woman;

sometimes a man prefers a man.

But to love:

this cannot be wrong.

So Lydia: she cannot be condemned.

And that's the end of it.

And as for you,

there will be no punishment for you either,

even though you may have done wrong,

there will be no justice.

For the sake of healing

for life to go on

there will be no justice.

Now, Piero, it will be your job

to keep all this out of the hands of courts and judges.

That much you can do.

And now,

you girls,

alone in the world,

what will you do?

I have to tell you, I wish you would stay on here with me.

I would take you in and care for you

as my own daughters.

That would make me happy.

[Thyona turns back to face her,

and she speaks to Thyona]

I like a strong woman.

[and then to Olympia]

And I like a woman who sticks with her sister.
You'll see,
one day you'll find a good man.
Or not.

A woman doesn't always need a man.
I myself, I no longer need a man—
except, of course, my son Piero,
who stays with me forever,
and Giuliano, who takes such good care of me.

For we all live together
and come to embrace
the splendid variety of life on earth
good and bad
sweet and sour
take it for what it is: the glory of life.

This is why at weddings
everybody cries
out of happiness and sorrow
regret and hope combined.

Because, in the end,
of all human qualities, the greatest is sympathy—

GIULIANO
for clouds even

BELLA
or snow

GIULIANO
for meadows
for the banks of ditches

BELLA

for turf bogs
or rotten wood
for wet ravines

GIULIANO

silk stockings
buttons

BELLA

birds nests
hummingbirds

GIULIANO

prisms

BELLA

jasmine

GIULIANO

orange flower water

BELLA

lessons for the flute

GIULIANO

a quill pen

BELLA

a red umbrella

GIULIANO

some faded thing

BELLA

handkerchiefs made of lawn

GIULIANO

of cambric

BELLA
of Irish linen

GIULIANO
of Chinese silk

BELLA
dog's blood

GIULIANO
the dung beetle

BELLA
goat dung

GIULIANO
a mouse cut in two

BELLA
In spring the dawn.
In summer the nights.
In autumn the evenings

GIULIANO
In winter the early mornings
the burning firewood
piles of white ashes
the ground white with frost

BELLA
spring water welling up

GIULIANO
the hum of the insects
the human voice

BELLA
piano virtuosos
orchestras

GIULIANO
the pear tree

BELLA
The sunlight you see in water as you pour it from a pitcher into a bowl.

GIULIANO
The earth itself.

BELLA
Dirt.

[Here comes, immediately, at full volume,
Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" from *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Lydia and Nikos kiss
and a hundred flashbulbs go off for a wedding picture.

A receiving line
is instantly constituted,
and Lydia and Nikos make their way down the line—
all the guests kissing the bride and shaking the groom's hand
and talking among themselves and fussing with their clothes.

Nikos stops for an earnest conversation with Piero—
which we cannot hear at all over the music—
about how sometimes men don't even want to get married
because they find it hard enough getting through the day on their own
all by themselves, and the burdens of life are so heavy and the demands so great
they think: how can I take on the responsibility of someone else, too,
not that they would take on the responsibility entirely, but to the extent they do,
because they have made a promise to see life through together
and sometimes a man could just cry, things seem so hard,
but when you fall in love, what choice do you have?

At the last moment,
everyone turns front,
a hundred flash cameras go off again,
the family photo is taken.]

OLYMPIA

Lydia! Lydia! Throw your bouquet!

[Lydia throws her bouquet into the audience.

Booming music.]

OLYMPIA

And your garter! Your garter!

[Lydia pulls up her dress.

Nikos takes her garter
and throws that into the audience.

Everyone throws rice.

Lydia and Nikos, the bride and groom,
exit up the center aisle to the music.

Nikos's clothing is disheveled,
and he looks sheepish and uncertain,
even frightened, maybe even filled with foreboding—
in fact, they both look shellshocked and devastated—
as Nikos exits up the aisle with Lydia.

Fireworks.]

THE END

NOTE:

Big Love is inspired by what some believe to be the earliest surviving play of the western world, *The Suppliant Women* by Aeschylus.

Big Love is also inspired by, or takes texts from, Klaus Theweleit, Leo Buscaglia, Gerald G. Jampolsky, Valerie Solanus, Maureen Stanton, Lisa St Aubin de Teran, Sei Shonagon, Eleanor Clark, Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, Kate Simon, and Laurie Williams, among others.

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